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SUBJECT: Islamic Religious Classes in Baden-Wuerttemberg: Positive Initial Reports

REF: 2005 Frankfurt 2478

Sensitive but unclassified; not for internet distribution.

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In September 2006, Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W) became the latest German state to offer Islamic religious instruction in public schools. On January 17, the Consul General and state officials observed a class at the Rosensteinschule in Stuttgart, one of twelve elementary schools taking part in the pilot program. School officials say parental interest is high and initial reviews are positive. END SUMMARY.

Immigrant Parents Involved and Learning As Well

¶2. (U) In an effort to help integrate its substantial and growing Muslim population (approximately 600,000 or 5.7 percent), the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg recently introduced Islamic religious instruction in public schools (reftel). While many German states offer Islamic instruction in various forms, Baden-Wuerttemberg is the first to field a religious curriculum for public schools that state officials and Muslim groups have agreed upon (along the lines of approved curricula for Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths). Since the start of the 2006/2007 school year, Islamic religious courses have been offered on a trial basis at twelve elementary schools throughout B-W. Instruction is in German, something welcomed by immigrant parents, and initial reactions are positive. Due to strong demand, six to eight additional teachers will be hired for the 2007/2008 academic year. In the city of Mannheim, for instance, there are forty children on a waiting list for classes.

¶3. (U) On January 17, the Consul General visited an Islamic class at Stuttgart's Rosensteinschule along with Dr. Barbara Lichtenthaeler, the B-W Education/Cultural Ministry official responsible for the program. Rosensteinschule has approximately 400 pupils of which eighty percent come from an immigrant/minority background (representing thirty-two different nations including Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt and Bosnia) and is one of two schools in state capital Stuttgart participating in the project.

¶4. (SBU) Schools, teachers, and public officials have worked for several years to bring the program to fruition and they are anxious to see it succeed. Lichtenthaeler said it had taken over seven years to introduce the curriculum (reftel) and that an important factor in the program's success is parental consent and involvement. The teacher, Ms. Goekcen Tamer-Uzun, told us of the deep interest parents are showing in the classes and of her efforts to get to know parents. School principal Ingrid Macher echoed these sentiments. According to Tamer-Uzun, many parents have only a basic knowledge of Islam and see the classes as a chance to learn more about their religion. Tamer-Uzun pointed out that some parents actually prefer the public school curriculum over classes held in mosques, since parents have less influence and feedback from mosque-based instruction. At present, Tamer-Uzun is the only teacher for both

Stuttgart schools; she tries to portray the Islamic faith in the context of German culture as well.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Public school Islamic religious instruction -- made possible by the traditional interaction of church and state in German school system -- is an important step in Baden-Wuerttemberg's efforts to integrate its growing Muslim population. The state now needs to expand the program with additional teachers and a secondary school curriculum (the current program applies only to elementary schools). Curriculum development was a sticking point in this prolonged endeavor, given the Muslim community's religious fragmentation (reftel). The state also needs to bolster instruction at B-W universities in order to train future teachers. Despite these challenges, all sides welcome the program, which could serve as a model for other German states.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

POWELL